

PATENT

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IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended) A hardware upgrade for enhancing the functionality of a set top converter in a television program delivery system, each set top converter having a mailbox adapted to receive electronic mail and having a microprocessor, the hardware upgrade comprising:

an interface for providing an electrical connection to the set top converter, whereby the electronic mail is transferred from the set top converter for processing and the processed electronic mail is passed to the set top converter for display;

a memory for storing interactive programming instructions that enable a subscriber to engage in textual interactivity with online applications; and

at least one microprocessor connected to said memory and connected to said interface for accessing the stored interactive programming instructions and for processing the electronic mail to produce processed electronic mail based on the stored interactive programming instructions, the microprocessor of the hardware upgrade capable of communicating with the microprocessor of the set top converter through the interface.

2. (Original) The hardware upgrade according to claim 1, wherein said television program delivery system comprises digital video.

3. (Original) The hardware upgrade according to claim 1, wherein the interface is a mailbox interface and the electronic mail is transferred between the set top converter and the mailbox interface in a serial or a parallel format.

4. (Original) The hardware upgrade according to claim 1, wherein the interface comprises:

circuitry for receiving subscriber inputs from the set top converter, wherein the received subscriber inputs include textual information that is used to produce the processed electronic mail and for transferring the processed electronic mail to the set top converter for display.

5. (Original) The hardware upgrade according to claim 1, for use with on-line databases, interactive services and message services outside of the television program delivery system, wherein the hardware upgrade further comprises a telephone modem connected to the at least one microprocessor and adapted to provide communications capability with the on-line databases, interactive services and message services.

6. (Previously Presented) The hardware upgrade according to claim 4, further comprising:
a memory connected to the at least one microprocessor for storing the processed electronic mail.

7-15. (Cancelled)

16. (currently amended) A method for enhancing the functionality of a set top converter in a television program delivery system, each set top converter having a mailbox adapted to receive electronic mail and having a microprocessor, the method comprising the steps of:

providing an electrical connection between the set top converter and a hardware upgrade the mailbox, whereby the electronic mail is transferred from the set top converter for processing;

storing interactive programming instructions that enable a subscriber to engage in textual interactivity with online applications;

accessing the stored interactive programming instructions; and
processing the electronic mail to produce processed electronic mail based on the stored interactive programming instructions; and
communicating between the microprocessor of the set top converter and a microprocessor of the hardware upgrade.

17. (Original) The method according to claim 16, wherein said television program delivery system comprises digital video.

18. (Original) The method of claim 16, further comprising the step of:
transferring data between the set top converter and the mailbox in either serial or parallel format.

19. (Original) The method according to claim 16, wherein said step of providing an electrical connection to the set top converter further comprises:
receiving subscriber inputs from the set top converter, wherein the received subscriber inputs includes textual information that is used to produce the processed electronic mail; and
transferring the processed electronic mail to the set top converter for display.

20. (Original) The method according to claim 16, further comprising the step of communicating with on-line databases, interactive services and message services outside of the television program delivery system.

21. (Original) The method according to claim 19, further comprising the step of:
storing the processed electronic mail.

22-40. (Cancelled)

41. (currently amended) A hardware upgrade card for enhancing the functionality of a set top converter in a television program delivery system, each set top converter having a mailbox adapted to receive electronic mail and having a microprocessor, the hardware upgrade card comprising:

an interface for providing an electrical connection to the set top converter, whereby the electronic mail is transferred from the set top converter for processing and the processed electronic mail is passed to the set top converter for display;
a memory for storing interactive programming instructions; and
at least one microprocessor connected to said memory and connected to said

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interface for accessing the stored interactive programming instructions and for processing the electronic mail to produce processed electronic mail based on the stored interactive programming instructions, the microprocessor of the hardware upgrade card capable of communicating with the microprocessor of the set top converter through the interface,

wherein said hardware upgrade card is removably connected to said set top converter.

42. (Previously Presented) The hardware upgrade card of claim 41, wherein the interactive programming instructions enable the subscriber to engage in textual interactivity with online application.

43. (New) The hardware upgrade of claim 1, wherein the hardware upgrade enables the subscriber to engage in textural interactivity using overlay menus.

44. (New) The hardware upgrade of claim 1, wherein the microprocessor of the set top converter is capable of coordinating reception of signals from the television program delivery system and interacting with an upstream data transmitter.